

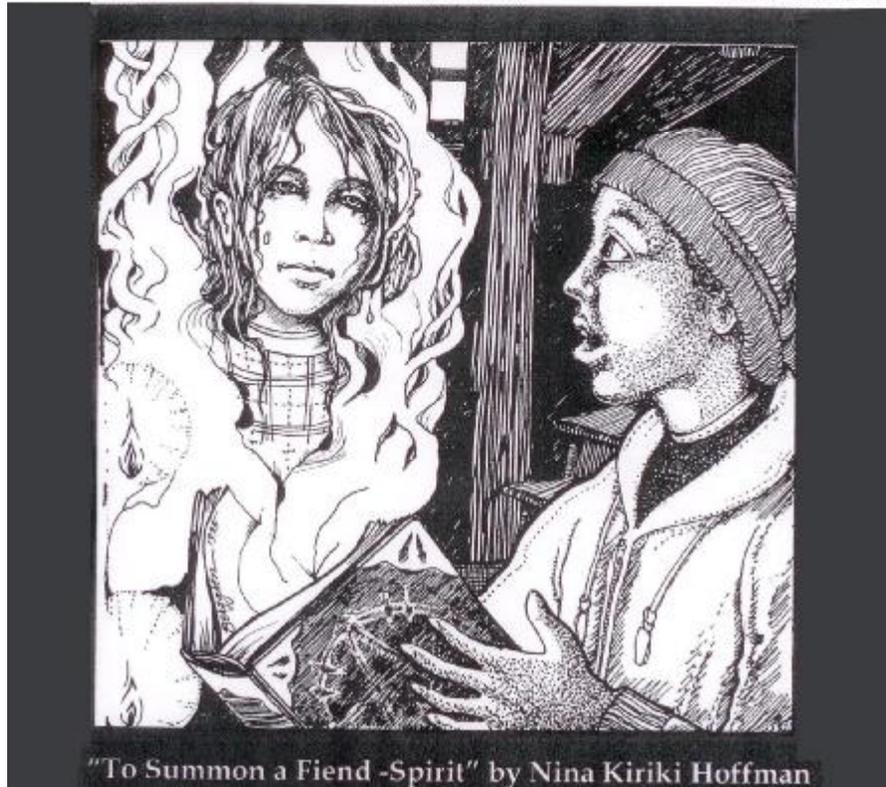
# SIRIUS VISIONS

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## To Summon a Fiend-Spirit

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Since he was anticipating a long stretch of lonely days in his new neighborhood where his old friends refused to come, Peter had a secret project for Christmas vacation. As soon as he got home from seventh grade Friday afternoon, he took his equipment down to the basement and went to work.

Presently he finished marking up the basement floor and brushed pale chalk dust off his dark hands. What he had drawn looked sort of like the picture he had been studying in the big slippery red book he had found behind Dad's dresser, except his sidewalk chalk set only had three colors, pink, blue, and yellow. The pink lines just didn't look like the blood-red lines in the picture, and nothing he had tried could make a dark purple like the one in the picture either. But he had drawn in all the squiggly little lines around the circle, and he had red and white candles burning in the short crystal holders he had borrowed from the fancy-stuff cupboard in the kitchen. He was burning incense on a green plate he had borrowed from the same cupboard. The basement smelled like damp concrete, fabric softener from the washer-dryer over against the wall, and sandalwood.

He sighed.

Did he really think this was going to work? If any of the stuff in the book really worked, by now Daddy would have used the "Money Come" spell so they could buy the house or at least Nintendo, or the "Make a Wandering Lover Return" spell to make Mom come back, or the "Attract a New Lover" spell on those pictures in the magazines Dad was always looking at, the ones of girls who didn't wear bathing suits.

So probably nothing in the red book worked, especially when you used the wrong color chalk, but Peter decided to try it anyway. He pricked his thumb with a needle, dripped three drops of blood in the middle of the pink-red circle, and said "Salve! Veni, veni, veni . . . ." He walked around the circle counter-clockwise chanting the

words, which he had memorized but was pretty sure he was pronouncing wrong. After a while it turned into a sing-song, and he threw in a little moonwalking, and pretty soon he was really dancing with it, rolling his head around, chicken-flapping his arms, not paying much attention anymore; he even scuffed out a couple of his chalk symbols by mistake.

"Hello?" said a girl's voice.

Peter jumped and opened his eyes. "Aaaah!" he said, staring at her.

She stood in the center of the pink circle, and she looked about his age, twelve, only she was white, chalk white, and she was wearing a dorky brown plaid dress that looked wet, and there was brown seaweed in her dripping hair. She wore no shoes.

He had been hoping for something he could relate to, like maybe a demon. Not a wet white girl.

"Yikes!" said Peter. "What happened to you?"

"What do you mean? Where am I, anyway?" She looked around, at the candles, at the floor in the flickering light, at Peter.

"This is the basement of my dad's house," he said. "You been swimming?"

"Don't be silly. I can't swim."

"Uh—" said Peter.

She licked a drip off her upper lip. "Salt," she said in a thoughtful voice. She glanced down at her dress, fingered the sodden material, stared down at her feet and wiggled her toes. Slowly she looked up at Peter, her eyebrows up, her mouth half open. He'd seen that look on Gina, a girl he used to play with in his old neighborhood. It meant a scream or a sob was coming soon.

"Hey," he said, before the look could produce its follow-up, "it's dry where we are now."

"But—" She swallowed. She reached up and pulled a strand of kelp off her head, stared at it. "Oh. Oh, I remember now." She blinked a few times. Another drip ran down her cheek but this time it came from her eye. "I didn't mean it. I was just going to

pretend—but the water was too strong. I just wanted to scare my stepmother but then I couldn't get back to the beach, and I—“ She stood there and cried for a while, awkward choky sobs that made Peter feel terrible. He wanted to comfort her somehow, but he was too scared to go near her. First, there was the fact that she was dead, and she'd gotten here because of him, which meant... that maybe some of the other, really scary stuff in the book would work, too. If Peter's best friend Jesse were here, he would have Big Plans, the kind that made Peter's stomach shrivel up and his blood run hot; but Peter was here alone, with this spooky girl.

Finally he went up and got a glass of water from the kitchen. Back in the basement, he held it out to her. She coughed a couple of times, and reached for the glass, but her hand didn't connect with it. The glass fell to the concrete and shattered, splashing water on them both.

The girl let out a wail. “It didn't touch me. I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead,” she cried, hugging herself. She shuddered all over. At last she rubbed her eyes with her fists and looked at him. “How'd I get here?” she asked in a small voice.

“I did a magic spell to summon you,” he said.

She blinked. “Why?” she asked.

“Well, it—it was kind of a spell to summon a friendly spirit; I didn't know it was, like, going to be a dead person.”

She stared at him. “What do you want a spirit for?”

“Well...” He didn't want to tell her that since Mom had left them, he and his dad had moved into this pukey neighborhood where all kids were the wrong color and wouldn't talk to him, and Dad was working two jobs to make the payments on this stupid house so he was never home, and Peter's friends from the old neighborhood were too far away to see very easy, and Christmas was closing in on them, but it looked like the gloomiest Christmas he had ever had, and—“I wanted to see if it would work. See, if this spell works, maybe some of the other ones in the book will work.” He went to where he had left the book. After three or four tries he managed to close his hands

around it. He brought it over where he could catch some candlelight, sat down, and flipped through the book, squinting at the handwritten words. “See? Here's one to bind a lover to you so they can't ever leave, and here's one to make your neighbor lose all his stuff, and here's one to make your mother-in-law sick, and—“

“But those are all mean,” said the girl.

Peter frowned at the book. He flipped back to the table of contents and read through the spells listed. The girl was right. They were mostly kind of mean.

He checked the table of contents for the spell he had actually used, and it said: “To Summon a Fiend-Spirit to Aid You.” He stared at it for a moment, then flipped to the page he had consulted while putting together the spell. The ink in the title was a little blurry. It did look sort of like “Friend-Spirit.” And spelling had never been his strong suit. He bit his lip.

“Where'd you get that book?” asked the girl.

“I think it's my father's.” But they had bought some of the furniture with the house, including the dresser the book had been behind; maybe Dad had never looked in back of it. “Or maybe not. I found it behind a piece of furniture. Are you a fiend?”

“I don't—“ she began, then her face screwed up into a tight frown. “Maybe.” She pulled another piece of kelp off her head. “I have this stepmother. Before she came, I was nice, but ever since Dad married her, I got—I got—well, I got mixed up. ‘Cause everything she says is so nice, but somehow it ends up meaning something else, and after a while I couldn't figure out what was going on and I just decided to be mean all the time. And now when she says something I just think of the meanest thing I can and say or do it, like this morning, she said, ‘There's quite a wind on the beach, dear, and we wouldn't want you to catch a chill, so if you're going out at all, which is not a good idea in this kind of weather, be sure to wear warm clothes, and don't go out on the rocks, the tide is so fierce this time of year,’ and on and on like that, and so I went out in this—“ touching her dress—“and I ran way out on the rocks, and I actually

went down between the rocks and the water came and got me.” She cried a little more. “And she was right, she was right, that’s what really hurts. If I had listened to her—“

“But she was doing a major trip on you,” said Peter. “She set you up.”

“What?” The girl looked startled.

“What’s your name, anyway?”

“Bonnie.”

“Mine’s Peter. That woman was leading you around to do what she wanted.”

“She wanted me to go in the water?”

“No doubt!”

“But she told me not to.”

“Yeah, it’s reverse psychology, and it works real good. Sometimes I use it on my dad. But he’s figured it out anymore and now I don’t know how to make him do anything.” He sighed, stroked the red book in his lap, realized what he was doing and let the book slither off his lap onto the floor.

Bonnie sat down inside the circle. “I don’t think I can make your father do anything,” she said. “I don’t think I can make anybody do anything.”

Peter stared at her. What? Oh, no! No. I didn’t want you to make him do something. You or whoever.”

“What did you want, then?”

He looked at her and then away. What he had really wanted was a friend who wouldn’t leave, a friend he could control, who would want to do whatever he wanted to do. A spirit would have been perfect. Like a genie in a bottle. You’re ready for a card game, uncork the bottle. You want to sneak out a night with a friend, let out the genie. A Spirit who could grant a few wishes once in a while, even better. A friend who could get big and scare off bullies, yeah, handy. A friend you could talk to evenings when Dad was at work, and being in the house alone got kind of scary. Someone to talk to about what it was like at school, where the only kids who

seemed willing to talk to you were the ones none of the other kids wanted to be friends with.

What did he have to lose, telling her that? Not like she’d rush out and make fun of him to all his non-friends around the neighborhood. “I just wanted a friend,” he said.

She looked at her lap. She grasped a handful of her hem and wrung it out. After about three minutes of unbearable silence, while tears ran down her face and she licked the ones that came near her mouth, she looked up at him. “I don’t have a home, she said. “She’s there. I haven’t had anyplace to be safe in since she moved in. Daddy’s not the same either. I’m dead and I don’t have anywhere to go. Can I stay here?”

He didn’t even know if he liked her. If all she did was cry all the time—if she kept dripping on everything—if she couldn’t do any neat tricks like walk through walls—she’d still be company at night. “Sure,” he said, after only a couple of seconds. “Let me show you around.” And then, before he could stop his mouth, it said, “You think you can walk through stuff?”

“I don’t know,” she said in a kind of snappy voice. “Death didn’t come with instructions.”

Better if she was snappy than if she was always weepy. “Will you at least try it?”

“Yeah, yeah,” she said.

“Can you come out of the circle?” The spell had said some warning-stuff about keeping the spirits contained, but he hadn’t paid much attention to it, since it came after the actual summoning, which he hadn’t expected to accomplish anything.

She stood up and tried to walk toward him, but ran into an invisible wall.

“Hmmm,” he said, and looked at the sidewalk chalk box. It said WASHABLE. Bonnie had dripped a lot on the floor, so he grabbed a pair of his dad’s underwear from the dirty laundry basket, went over and scrubbed at the chalk where it was wet. It came up easily. Bonnie stood quietly until he had erased half the circle. Then

she stepped out through the gap, leaving wet bare footprints behind her on the concrete.

“Can you stop dripping?” he said.

She looked behind her. She wrung out her hem again, leaving a pool of water beneath her, but her dress still looked sodden. “I don’t think so. Not right away, anyway.”

“Uh,” he said. “Stay off the carpets till you dry out, okay?”

“All right,” she said.

Peter turned on the basement light and snuffed one of the candles. Bonnie snuffed the others with her wet fingertips.

Carrying the slippery red book, which belonged behind the dresser whether Dad knew it was there or not, Peter led Bonnie up the rickety stairs and into the kitchen. The light over the stove was on, but everything else was dark. He’d spent the whole afternoon and part of the evening in the basement. As soon as he figured that out, his stomach started telling him he better do something about it. He turned on the overhead light and checked the freezer to see what they had by way of TV dinners. Salisbury steak. Good.

“It’s night,” said Bonnie, looking out the window.

“Yeah,” Peter said.

“But it was just morning... what day is this?”

“Friday, December 20, 1991.”

“No, it’s not. It’s Friday, December 18, 1987.”

They stared into each other’s eyes for a long moment. “Oh, Peter,” Bonnie whispered. He watched her hair. It was drying and fluffing. It looked like it might be blonde, dry.

Where had she been for four years?

Peter set the red book on the kitchen table and glared at it.

Bonnie went to the book and patted it. “If you hadn’t done the spell I would just be nowhere now,” she said in a hushed voice.

He tried to figure it out. Maybe if he had never done the spell she would have moved on to wherever it is dead people go. What if he had had the right colors of chalk and knew how to pronounce

Latin? Someone completely different might have turned up in the circle.

“Forget it,” he said picking up the book. Bonnie’s wet hand had left a print on the cover, but he didn’t care. “Come on. I’m putting this back where I found it.”

She dripped along the hall behind him but stood in the doorway to his dad’s room as he slipped the book behind the dresser. He got a towel out of the linen closet and let her back to the kitchen, put the towel on one of the kitchen chairs, and said, “Try that.”

“But if I can’t touch stuff—“

“Yeah, but you’re leaving real drips.”

She sat on the towel, then looked up at him, eyes wide. “I can feel it.” She stood up again and lifted the towel, dried herself, giving her hair a good scruffing.

“Oh, man,” he muttered, wondering if she would want to eat too. He turned on the oven, stuck in a TV dinner, and turned on the timer.

When she finished with the towel, it was sopping, her dress didn’t look like it would make a puddle every time she sat down, and her hair was a fluffy mess. She walked over to the basement door and threw the towel down the stairs. “Can I borrow a brush?”

“Come on,” he said, leading the way to his room. Glancing at her as she walked the hall, he noticed that she wasn’t leaving wet footprints anymore. Housebroken. That was a relief. In his room, he held out his comb to her and was unnerved when her hand took it from his. He reached out and touched her arm. It felt like ice, solid and cold.

“Hey!” she yelped. She poked him in the chest. It sent a freezing shock through him; he couldn’t move anything. Bonnie, combing out her hair, watched him, a frown growing on her face.

Sweat broke out on his forehead. At last he could move his fingers, then his arms and legs. He backed away from her.

“What?” she said. “What, what?”

“You froze me!”

“Well, you poked me. What do you mean, I froze you?” She put the comb down and began braiding her hair, which was honey blonde.

“I couldn’t move,” he said.

“I didn’t mean to—I’m sorry. Why’d you poke me?”

“I wanted to see if you were solid.”

“Oh!” She went to his dresser and picked up his hair gel, his whistle, and three Matchbox sports cars he still had. “Hey, this is great! I thought, after I dropped the glass—“

“So did I. But you picked up the towel and the comb.”

“I wasn’t thinking.”

“Try walking through something.”

She put down all his things and walked over to the wall. Stared at it right through his poster of Michael Jordan. She leaned against the wall for a minute, her eyes closed in concentration. Then she put her hands against the wall and pushed, and her arms disappeared up to her shoulders. She pushed harder and fell through the wall. He could hear her laughing out in the hall. Her head came back in through the wall, right through Michael Jordan’s shoes, and she was making the worst face he had ever seen. “It’s just like in the movies,” she said, and laughed, and disappeared.

He sat on his bed and listened to her going through the house, opening and closing the medicine cabinet in the bathroom, sitting on his dad’s squeaky bed, flicking the TV on and off in the living room, opening and shutting cupboards in the kitchen, laughing everywhere she went. He wondered what he had gotten himself into. Now the place was haunted by something that could freeze him with a touch, who, by her own confession, was kind of mean.

The timer in the kitchen dinged. His stomach wasn’t asking for food so loudly anymore; right now it was acting queasy. Until this point he hadn’t even thought what his dad might say about all this.

Maybe he’d feel better after he ate. He went into the kitchen.

She had put his dinner on a potholder on the table, and wadded up the plastic film from the dinner’s top, leaving it on the counter. Now she was snooping through drawers. Peter got a fork out of the dish drying rack and sat down in front of the steaming dinner. The gravy and the apple crumble smelled great. “Thanks,” he said, almost afraid to talk to her.

She sat down across from him. “You’re welcome.”

“Are you—are you hungry?”

“Nope.”

“Whew.” He began to eat, and she watched him. It made him nervous, but he was still pretty hungry after all, so he went ahead and ate.

Dad’s key sounded in the kitchen door’s lock. Peter and Bonnie jumped. Stared at each other. Waited.

“Got off early at the store,” said his father, coming into the kitchen and shucking his coat. “We’re having some kind of last-minute Christmas sale tomorrow starting at eight, and I have to be there by six to set up. That smells good. We got another one like that?”

“Yeah,” said Peter, setting his fork down as though it might break.

“Good. Oven’s still hot. How was your day?” He moved right past Bonnie and hung his coat on the hook by the all door.

Peter said, “I made kind of a mess in the basement, but I’ll clean it up after supper.”

“Oh? What were you doing down there?” His father got out a TV dinner and put it in the oven. Bonnie sat frozen, only her eyes moving as she watched Dad move across the kitchen.

“I was, uh, I was, uh, art stuff.”

“Art stuff?” said his father frowning. “Why do you want to clean it up? It didn’t work out right?”

“It worked.”

“Can I see it?”

Peter shrugged. "Sure. What's left. It got messed up near the end."

His father went to the basement door, looked down. "Hey, what's this towel doing on the stairs?"

"I was going to move it to the dirty laundry basket after supper."

His father started down the stairs. "Smells salty!" he called.

Bonnie whispered, "I don't think he saw me, do you?"

"No, guess not," whispered Peter.

"Would he have said something?"

"Probably."

"This is so weird—"

"Peter!" bellowed his father from below. "What have you been doing?"

"Oh, God," whispered Peter. "He knows."

"You ruined a pair of my shorts!"

"Maybe not," whispered Bonnie.

"And where'd you copy this thing on the floor from? Damn! You been in my room?" Now there was absolute fury in his voice.

His father came stomping up the stairs. "How many times have I told you not to go in my room?"

Peter said nothing.

"What have you done?" asked his father, staring into his eyes.

Peter just stared back.

"You been at Granny Mort's book?" said his father in a tight voice. "The one Aunt Marie told me you wouldn't even be able to touch?"

Peter switched his gaze to the congealing gravy on his Salisbury steak.

"Answer me! You pick that book up?"

"It was kind of slippery."

"She told me you wouldn't be able to lay a hand on it! That's the only reason I let her put it in the house. Damn! I can't even pick it up without using tongs. Would have thrown it out a long time ago,

otherwise—soon as you learned how to read." His father went around the table and sat on the chair across from Peter. Bonnie slipped out of it just in time. "What kind of conjure did you do?"

"I got me a ghost."

"What did you want with a ghost?"

Peter shrugged.

"So, what happened?" asked his dad.

"She's right over by the stove."

"What!" His dad looked all around the room, his eyes not stopping anywhere near Bonnie.

"We been wondering if you would be able to see her or not, but I guess not. Her name's Bonnie. Can she stay, Dad? Can she?"

His father swallowed. "I don't know, Peter. Is she nice?"

"Yeah," said Peter, keeping his doubts to himself.

"What'd she die from?"

"Drowning. She's my age."

"She do any tricks, or just talk?"

"She can do stuff."

His father stared at the tabletop for a while, his forehead furrowed. At last he looked up. "Bonnie, you got to stay out of the bathroom when we're in it," he said. "You got to stay out of my bedroom when I'm in it, especially if I'm not alone in there. And you got to not do anything evil. If you get evil, I'll have to get Aunt Marie over here to hex you out of the house. You understand?"

"Yes," said Bonnie, nodding.

"She answer me, Peter?"

"She says yes."

"I got to call your Aunt Marie," said Peter's father, "and tell her to get that book out of here. Excuse me." He went to use the phone in his bedroom.

"What a dad," Bonnie said, after they had heard the bedroom door close behind him.

Peter gave up his main course and switched to dessert. “He’s not done with me yet. He’s gonna ground me and take away TV privileges, probably for this whole vacation, maybe longer.”

Bonnie grinned. “I’ll stay home with you.” She said. She took a deck of cards out of a drawer she had snooped in earlier. “You play rummy?”

“Not yet,” said Peter.

By the time his father came out of the bedroom Peter had learned the basics.

